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Bard

Les Naufrages

Playing cat with the blue
reality she said. The water
all the way up the thigh
as if it too were trying
to remember something.

Memory darkens things
memory creeps up cloth
memory soaks memory
sticks. Then the canoe
went under, the bow gash
sucking water in and

she was standing still.
Memory is shallow partner
nobody ever drowned
in memory love she said
just spend an evil quarter
hour shiver by the fire.

21 February 2007

= = = = =

But I wanted different, wanted the gouge
to interfere with thick inarticulate
clay and leave a smart wedge behind.
Writing means scratching in. What is it
into which the words now sink that once
settled down in peaceful Tigris mud
five thousand years ago? Not enough,
the paper. Not enough the wall,
or the back of that beautiful woman we
call the Sky, not enough the night,
narrated with other people's constellations.
Not enough. Desire is the best
proof of all, if I want it it must exist
somewhere. The ultimate inscription.

21 February 2007

THE OVERTURE FORGETS ITS OPERA

The blue man slipped through the trees.
The mule smuggler sleeps in a shallow cave.
The baker's wife is full of self-denial.
The priest hides diamonds in holy water.
The stonemason sinks his tools out of sight in softest clay.
The football player kicks seafoam on an empty beach.
The motorman's train gets longer and longer.
The florist is drunk again and sprawls among freesias.
The blue man stumbles into the clearing.
The insurance man rubs out every 6 on the contract.
The geometry teacher breaks down and squeezes a peach.
The stranded passenger invents a utopia.
Everything is transparent.
The blue man is right in front of you now.
His face is almost touching yours.
He tries unsuccessfully to calm you and allay your fear.
He says I am the blue man, at last I have come.

21 February 2007
End of NB 296

MASTERCLASS

He gave you the light
I hear her quote.

Something sung. A novel
from Africa. *Morenga*.
Lenses of the wrong diopter
for these right eyes.

*

going to heaven
on a sled downhill
in just enough snow

the snow goes fast
beneath the motionless
runner, the boy's

breath freezes before him
a blue word
and he is there

*

Just enough snow
to go

the hurry in my hands
to know you

*

Heaven is a habit
after all

*

And then I was sleeping
like a lemon tree
I was waking like water

*

(The experienced singer explains how important the American sound [æ] is, to sing that right, as it is, not rounding or stretching. Keep it American. So for years she did her vocalizing exercises on [æ], till she could “sing it anywhere, a strong, motivated American [æ].”)

*

The fact that I’m not hearing it
means comfort

*

Why clasp our hands
when we sing?
Are they our paws
and we are suppliants
before some huge God
made entirely of ear?

*

How much knowing
is locked in this quiet doing
making the sound rich

*

The hand
hurts from holding,
the heart
from letting go.

*

A voice coming out of her mouth
like a king leading his army,
elephants, sunblaze, ivory and gold.

*

“Singing is telling somebody about it.”

*

sacred
“not an easy word for anybody”

*

What is this moon of which the poets sing?
A bowl of soup, a tale told in the dark,
a face staring in the window.

*

Night.
I in the middle of *not*.

*

Soul used to mean what
self does now.
The vale of self.
Hell is a habit too.

*

Words ignite.

Words ignite words.

*

Ignite = Put out the night.

*

Writing is performance. In a genuine writers workshop, each poet would write one poem while all the others watched, commented, swooned, kibitzed. Writing is performance. Then the next would compose. All would witness, be audience. Writing is performance. The performed words emerge and smite. Strike. Stroke. Listen, writing is performance.

*

Who hears the light?
I do, said red.
Me too, said blue.
But who hears the dark?
And no one spoke.

*

Do angels have feet?
No. They use other means
to wear high heels.

The spirit is a flood of rules.

*

American *lieder* (Copland, Rorem) tend to sound like cocktail hour at the piano bar, just enough melody to make you think somebody is singing to you.

*

Fear of melody = fear of intensity. We dread the melodic the way we dread commitment. A tune tends to marry you. We say: can you carry a tune? Over the threshold, into the whole life.

*

Classes, master classes, classroom teaching. A class makes me think of Eastern Parkway in the old days, all the old people seated on slatted park benches. Sprinkle salt on celery, nibble a banana. People almost listen to each other. The way bats are almost birds.

21 February 2007

[Composed for the most part during a master class given by the soprano Phyllis Curtin at Bard, 20 February 2007. Words in quotation marks are things she actually said (or my hearing from the back of the hall thought she said, I may be wrong). Everything else is just me thinking, as often contradicting the drift of the class as attending to it.]

ANSWER TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

You veer and I hold.
You swerve. I stand.
You circle and I square.

I make of all this listening
a crystal thing
an amethyst against your rush.

Rausch
intoxication
carnival at Venice they do now

and under their prong-beaked vizards
phallic maskers devil the night
you also are.

Under the dome of the great church
rises sudden from the lagoon
we sat and understood. But what?

21 February 2007

= = = = =

Inferences
from interferences
not far.

A distance
intrudes. A man's
wife knows him

by ear.
It is said
and it is sad.

That there, here,
is no rule
no notation.

We misspell
each other
in the dark.

22 February 2007

= = = = =

This one thing
I don't have
to know,
a paucity

of kingship,
this vassal
flesh every
hour aware

but not of that,
the one that counts,
the door one,
the da capo bit.

* * *

The efficient pretty nurse, whose lips were formed with so sculpturally perfect a philtrum, bends over the dying man and announces clearly, "We'll take this whole scene again."

22 February 2007

= = = = =

Then there is always a way to go
a banner in the sky
a number – four digits – you repeat
over and over when you think you're asleep.
Only if you know this number, you can speak.

*

Because as Mary said
an angel is permission,
and permission itself
is nothing but awareness
that you are doing
what you're doing right.

It is right. And some of us
need angels to tell us that.
The miracle is knowing for yourself

man ist selbst Engel

but then the weather changes.
My skin is dry, rhymes with shy,
the tips of my fingers crack.
The pain then
 is the winter of things,
the mortal touch.

And where are your proud wings now,
rainbow angel, omnigendered, translucent,
love?

 Cover your eyes while I cry unashamed
because I am a pronoun in a world of things.

23 February 2007

ROSE FALL

no amount
of withering
takes away
the suchness
of them

red and yellow
darkening blood
and sand now
don't throw
them out
their history
is not over
not yet

withering also
is music
some ancient
Celtic maybe
highland wisdom
heard in this
day

to die
into oneself
the way only
a flower knows
how to do

don't throw out
a flower
has no out

the story
darkens
sheds
episodes of itself
onto the bright

table we read it
with our fingers

and that much
we can sweep
away the story
but not the teller

touched those same
tips that fled
before the small
unfading thorns.

23 February 2007

= = = = =

I can come
console you again
music. *Trösten*
ist's. The order
broken right
from the beginning
heals itself in us
simple ones
along the way.

This is a kind answer,
they work so hard
to stay alive,
almost all of them,
so few know
the energies of sleep
the soft illuminations
of sloth.
I would be lazy
lover if I could.

And let the music
beaver on by itself
with sparrows and all
restless things, quick
notations of sheer
appetite, delight,
this that
needs no listening.

24 February 2007

= = = = =

But I didn't ask.
It came so much,
a gondola laden low
with merrymakers
for all the dark lagoon,

came to mind,
that's all any ever
has to give,
what swims unbidden
into the momentary
sun glare where water
ripples on the seasteps

and the new thing comes,
comes to mind
and from the unstifled awe
a word's let loose
the rest of the world
supposes a mere
disruption whereas
it is itself,

the flesh of what happened,
the shadow
cast by will
on world
this thing you saw
this migrant skiff.

24 February 2007

= = = = =

To hear the rosin squeak
or the cello's sharp hoof
scrape on the floor and know
these things happen
in music but are not
music – who teaches that,
who teaches reading?

Isn't reading whatever happens in your head as your eyes move along the page?
How could it be otherwise?

Measure this: reading an isolate line appearing by itself, as against the 'same' line seen in the crowded page – can we get any information on the difference? How does the visual context – other words, other sentences nearby that the eye takes in as it goes – order or disorder that clear intent of the studied sentence?

If reading means all that happens when we read, then this action is a dance – a curious one, where the more active, analytic partner is less of a dancer, less rewarded, less graceful, gets less from the dance than the 'passive' responsive Ginger Rogers, the reader the text holds in its arms, dancing her backwards, always backwards and skillfully through the paradise of her past, her own summoned associations, her freshly revealed experiences. The lazy reader swallows the whole text.

24 February 2007

= = = = =

Let the moon mind.

Let the a b.

Then another.
Everything verbs.

Christ, it's always
another, some other.

Won't you. By Our Lady
listen to me? Listen to me:

there are fezzes on muezzins in my dream.
And scarlet pomegranate nectar
pools out around the base of emerald-bearing trees.

That isn't, is it, so hard to understand?

24 February 2007

= = = = =

All his life he's been measuring by the time between. That's not right. It isn't measuring, it's more sensing. The strong feeling of the space between Thursday and Monday, for instance. If for instance he is supposed to go to California on Thursday and do something there on Monday, the space of time between arrival and the doing will have a mysterious, sometimes terrible, shape and density of its own in foretaste. And the time between now in a place and leaving that place to go to another place, that space of time is overwhelming. When he is somewhere on Monday, it is inconceivable that leaving will happen on Wednesday. Desirable, sometimes immensely, he can't believe that it will happen. He wants it to, so that he can be gone. To another place. Another place always seems closer to home. But he feels on Tuesday he will never get to Thursday, whether he wants to leave or to stay, whether he dreads it or desires it, Friday is inconceivably far away. Now is so now.

25 February 2007

ANSWERS TO MARY REILLY'S QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Would you rather be fat or poor? *Fat. I've had a lot of practice.*
2. Are you kind to small animals? Which ones? *Yes, the ones I can see. I feed foxes, squirrels, release trapped mice.*
3. a) Have you ever used the word *duality*? *Yes, and I'm against it.*
b) Do you find this question deep? *No question is deep. A question is aggression. Which is why some of us like asking, being asked. A question is always a slap on the cheek or a kiss – both surface phenomena.*
4. Do you believe you have a duty to help those “less fortunate” than you? *Of course, though duty isn't quite how I think of it. Opportunity, maybe.*
5. Do you prefer the company of poor Black people to that of poor White people? *I like interesting, verbal, smartish people around me – that's the only preference I'm aware of.*
6. Do you wish you were famous? How famous? *Somewhat famous, enough to get foundation support, not enough to be recognized in the street.*
7. Is it more courageous to save yourself or someone else? *Since it's much harder to save yourself, I'd say it's more courageous to do so. But you really have to do the whole thing, save your whole self, past, present and future.*
8. Who did you want to be like when you were small? *Large. I wanted to be big enough to do whatever I wanted. Walk down any street. Read any book.*
9. Who did you want to look like. *A handsome man walking along a road.*
10. Who is the least offensive person you can think of? *Norlha Rinpoche.*
11. Is this person effective? *More than anyone I've met.* What do they contribute? *He makes people aware. Is that a contribution? He makes people alert to their own possibilities, and does it directly, not by a book.*
12. Who is the most offensive woman on Television? *I can't think of one off hand. I guess I'm not easily offended.*
13. Who is the most offensive Black person in the media? *Are there Black people in the media? Aren't the media all grey? Anyway, I'm not conscious of being offended by anyone out there. Except the rulers of the republic.*
14. Can you name five countries in either Central or South America? *Guatemala, Surinam, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua. (I could name them all, I like names.)*
15. Can you name five countries in Europe? *Belarus, Latvia, Luxemburg, Slovenia, Macedonia.*

[answered 25 February 2007]